

For the Good of All: A Case Study of Collaboration between a University Library and a Public Library System

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Abstract

In June 2003, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) and the Central Arkansas Library System (CALS) embarked on a partnership to combine their collections documenting Arkansas history and politics. There is much to be gained by examining relationships where the partners bring special strengths to the table. This paper outlines the challenges and benefits of the collaboration between institutions with different missions and operational methods.

UALR, as Arkansas's premier metropolitan university with a student population of approximately 13,000, is committed to responding to the needs of the community by creating active links between the campus, community, and commerce. UALR was founded in 1927 as Little Rock Junior College (LRJC) to meet the educational needs of the community. In 1957, LRJC became a four-year institution named Little Rock University (LRU), and then became a member of the University of Arkansas system in 1969. Thousands of central Arkansas students have been afforded a relatively inexpensive higher education since LRJC first opened its doors to the institution it is today. As James E. Lester, Jr., stated LRJC was the "people's college" (Lester 1987). As the university grew, it evolved from a junior college to a doctoral research university, and the breadth and scale of its public service agenda also grew and evolved. The University's Fast Forward: the Strategic Plan states that "UALR's commitment to the public it serves is one of the university's defining characteristics" (*UALR Fast Forward in Review* 2010).

The libraries supporting UALR and its predecessors grew from LRJC's small collection of books borrowed from the high school library to the dedicated libraries at LRU's and UALR's current location in west Little Rock (Lester 1987; Elkins 1963). Opened April of 1976, Ottenheimer Library is the UALR's main library. The library's Archives and Special Collections department was established in 1978 and the first archivist was hired in 1979. This department contains materials that are historically significant to the university as well as the state of Arkansas. The collections include materials from nineteenth and twentieth century Arkansas, including those related to the 1957 Little Rock School District Crisis. By the 1980s, the collections had grown and expanded to include a significant number of books on Arkansas, information on the Trans-Mississippi West, and extensive materials related to Arkansas's experience in the Civil War (including the J.N. Heiskell Civil War Collection). In addition to manuscripts, pamphlets, photographs, architectural drawings, and maps, the collection

also includes the gubernatorial collections of five former Arkansas governors—Carl Bailey, Winthrop Rockefeller, Dale Bumpers, Frank White, and Jim Guy Tucker.

In 1997, the Central Arkansas Library System’s (CALS) main branch was relocated to a commercial building in the Little Rock’s River Market District. It serves a local population of approximately 320,000 and is the largest public library system in Arkansas. Its twelve libraries are located in Little Rock as well as Pulaski and Perry Counties. CALS also serves an additional state-wide population of nearly one million users (CALS 2013). The new library became an anchor for the neighborhood, annually drawing nearly 450,000 visitors to the district.

Another major collection of Arkansas studies materials is located at the Butler Center. The Butler Center for Arkansas Studies originally located in CALS building was created in 1997 through an endowment by the late Richard C. Butler, Sr. Initially the center set out to pursue an active collection policy of primary sources on “all things Arkansas.” The collection currently includes “a wide variety of materials on life in Arkansas, including its natural history and the ways it is situated in its broader political and bioregional contexts” (Stricklin 2013). In addition to books, manuscripts, maps, political cartoons, and photographs, the center has an extensive art collection housed in four galleries that feature the work of Arkansas artists. In 2003, CALS made a significant addition to the center’s collections by acquiring the gubernatorial papers of former President William J. Clinton.

The Arkansas Studies Institute building was created by joining three buildings in the River Market District—two of which are restored historic buildings with a twenty-first century construction. The building is located near the CALS Main Library, the Clinton Presidential Library, the Historic Arkansas Museum, the Old State House Museum, and the Convention Center. The ASI building was created to house under one roof many of the state’s premier historical and political collections in order to provide one facility for study, teaching, and research. The Arkansas Studies Institute, which opened in March 2009, houses four different organizations: Arkansas Humanities Council, the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, UALR’s Center for Arkansas History and Culture, and the Clinton School of Public Service (ASI 2012).

A Review of Joint-Use Library Facilities

Libraries are widely known for their mission of sharing their resources with their particular community (academic, public, school, etc.), but they are not as well-known for sharing their facilities, staffs, and services with other organizational entities. However, both academic and public libraries have collaborated and cooperated for many years on a wide variety of levels. One of the largest and best known of these collaborative ventures is the nonprofit Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) founded in 1967. This cooperative currently consists of 23,000 libraries in 170 countries and facilitates the sharing of catalog records and interlibrary borrowing of materials worldwide. The OCLC cooperative catalog (WorldCat) now contains over 200 million records in 480 languages and 1.6 billion individual library-holding

locations. However, most of the research studies on specific academic and public library collaborations have focused on joint-use facilities. The participating public and academic libraries are looking “to pool their resources to create a whole greater than its two halves” and to provide “improved access to library [materials and] services in a cost effective manner” (Passalacqua 1999).

Joint-use facilities have been successful in providing cost-effective resources and facilities for a number of years. A very thorough discussion of this form of “town and gown” collaboration is put forth by Claire Gunnels, Susan Green, and Patricia Butler (2012), which covers organizational culture, the design of physical facilities, the collection development of information resources, as well as the legal and technological considerations that need to be taken into consideration.

Perhaps the most prominent of the cooperative joint-use ventures is the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library in San Jose, California. This facility opened in August 2003 and is funded, managed, and operated by the San Jose Public Library and San Jose State University. Patricia Senn Breivik, Luann Budd, and Richard F. Woods (2005) describe both the challenges and opportunities of the San Jose library marriage (distinguished from a merger). The authors emphasize the importance of using the term marriage rather than merger in that each partner will continue to maintain their own personality while “contributing different strengths and talents to the partnership.” Issues that arose, requiring collaborative resolution and compromise, included human resources practices, melding two institutional cultures, and information technology issues.

Other successful examples of joint-use projects include that of Florida Atlantic University/Indian River Community College/St. Lucie County Library in Florida, which opened in 1995 (Roshaven and Widman 2001); the Library, Research, and Information Technology Center joint-use facility of Nova Southeastern University and the Broward County (Florida) Board of County Commissioners (Hunt and Tunon 2002); as well as that of the College Hill Library formed by the city of Westminster, Colorado, and Front Range Community College (Fontenot 2007; Sullivan, Taylor, Barrick, and Stelk 2006).

In most cases, these joint-use facilities are governed by legal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or Intergovernmental Agreements detailing the responsibilities, rights, and cost-sharing arrangements of the parties involved (Roshaven and Widman 2001). These agreements usually emphasize a sharing of materials, staff expertise, and facilities among the now broadened constituencies.

Collaborative sharing may also involve the cooperative storage of library materials in a remote facility. Again, the institutions are not necessarily giving up their ownership of the materials, but they may simply share the physical storage facility and cost. One example of academic-public library collaboration, the Research Collections and Preservation Consortium (ReCAP), opened in 2002 and is jointly owned by Princeton and Columbia Universities and the New York Public Library. The ReCAP institutions expect to retain their individual ownership of the stored items. At the other end of the

cooperative spectrum is the Five College Library Depository (FCLD) operated by Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, founded in 1951. In this case, the ownership of items is relinquished by the individual institutions to the FCLD as items are transferred to the jointly administered depository. The workings of this model are detailed by Bridegam (2001).

However, there have been virtually no studies on the actual transfer of a significant collection of physical library materials from an academic-university library to a public library or public-library system. In the library literature, there is a great deal written about the intra-institutional movement of materials from university branch libraries to either main libraries or remote storage facilities. One recent example of the process of the material transfer from one physical facility to another (still within the same library system) is discussed by Czechowski, Barger, Fort, and Maxeiner (2010) at the University of Pittsburgh. The thoughtful carefully planned transfer of materials from one unit to another at the same institution is a complex and labor- and time-intensive undertaking. The transfer of materials to a joint-use facility increases the challenges, but also greatly magnifies the opportunities for constituent services for the entire community.

Although only tangential to our discussion, successful examples of different types of public-academic library cooperation and collaboration in public outreach programs are extensively covered in the library literature. For example, Lawton and Lawton (2009) discuss how staff at the Map Library of the University of Minnesota Libraries and the Hennepin County Library's James K. Hosmer Special Collections Library have cooperatively worked together to develop public presentations and guides to house, neighborhood, and land history resources in the Twin Cities, which has enabled them to build on the individual strengths of the staff members and collections of the individual institutions. In addition, Martin, Garcia, and McPhee (2012) discuss the information literacy program cooperation between the Oviatt Library at California State University, Northridge, and the Northridge Academy High School, which involved academic library staff as well as the public school teachers.

Combining Collections in Arkansas—The Process

Arkansas, like many other states, has a rich and interesting history. The ASI building was designed to bring together the collections related to Arkansas history, politics, and genealogy, and to be able to coordinate work among the various institutions to more efficiently and effectively manage the formerly disparate collections (Robertson 2003). It represented a major initiative to document and preserve the Arkansas experience both past, present, and future.

Step 1: Planning

In the summer of 2002, Joel Anderson, then UALR Provost, asked several prominent faculty members of the UALR History and Political Science Departments to begin conversations regarding the idea of combining or co-locating the UALR's Archives

and Special Collections to the CALS Main Library. This group also included the director of Ottenheimer Library as well as library staff. The advantage of moving the Archives and Special Collections to CALS was that all manuscripts and the governor's papers would be together in one research facility. The only disadvantage would be to make the Archives and Special Collections somewhat less immediately accessible to UALR students and faculty.

Soon after, the library staff put together a separate proposal combining the Archives and Special Collections' Arkansas materials as a distinct branch of the Ottenheimer Library. This branch would be known as the Arkansiana Division and would be located near the Clinton Presidential Library in a building occupied by CALS. According to the proposal, "the new branch of library operations would provide a unique opportunity for research and study by bringing together primary and secondary source materials devoted to the history, politics, and development of Arkansas," and it would connect the university with the River Market District (Sanders and Pine 2002).

By the fall of 2002, negotiations on the two proposals between UALR and CALS on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) began to meld the ideas. It was at this time that Chancellor Charles Hathaway asked Provost Anderson to outline in detail with the parties involved, two versions of a MOU (Hathaway 2002). One version would be relocating only the gubernatorial papers at UALR, and the other would be a separate broader option combining the Archives and Special Collections at CALS. Discussions included the amount of space required for a complete relocation to CALS as well as staffing needs, a cost analysis, and the advantages and disadvantages of relocating. A passionate discussion by faculty and library staff followed regarding which materials to relocate. The negotiations continued through the summer of 2003 when an agreement was reached to participate in a joint venture. UALR and CALS would maintain ownership of their respective collections as well as supervision of staff in the new ASI building. On June 25, 2003, a press conference announced the joint venture, "the new project for the study of Arkansas history and politics is a unique undertaking because it brings together the resources of two strong public institutions that have agreed to work together toward a common goal: improving access to materials about Arkansas history" (CALS 2003). Former President William J. Clinton spoke at the press conference, saying, "I want all these records together because I want people to know more about Arkansas history ... I want them to see how in these various governors' terms the states really were laboratories of democracy in many ways" (Schuette and Sawyer 2010).

The historic structures renovated for the ASI building were purchased by CALS in 2003. UALR actively participated in the design of the space, ensuring that it met the needs for the collections and staff. Based on the MOU, UALR's costs would be the pro rata share of utilities and cleaning (Anderson 2003). UALR and CALS would operate distinct programs in the building, but all would be dedicated to the study of Arkansas. It opened to the public in March 2009.

Step 2: The Move to the ASI Building

Planning the move of the UALR collections began a number of years prior to the finalization of the MOU in 2009. The MOU established that primary sources of Arkansas be moved, including manuscripts, photographs, pamphlets, architectural drawings, and maps that did not duplicate the CALS/Butler Center collections. The first move of materials was in January 2009 shortly before the ASI building opened to the public. In preparation for the move, library staff measured the amount of space the collection would occupy in order to decide which materials were to be relocated first. They also conducted an assessment of books that were clearly Arkansas in nature. Due to a lack of an accurate computerized inventory, it was harder than expected to create a duplicate books list for comparison between UALR and CALS, so a physical review was conducted. As a result, nearly 50 percent of the manuscript collections were moved in January 2009. Between September and December of 2010, the remaining manuscripts materials, the J.N. Heiskell Civil War Collection, the remaining Arkansas books, as well as architectural drawings, maps, and microforms were moved. “As we began to move materials in the latter stages, decisions became more complicated” (Baldwin 2013). Materials that were clearly not Arkansas in nature began to surface, such as long standing runs of out-of-state newspapers, ephemera, paintings, and even materials clearly related to UALR. The materials were moved to a storage area in the Ottenheimer Library. The library staff re-inventoried the materials and determined on a case-by-case basis, along with information obtained from library sources and the Internet, which materials to move to the ASI building. These materials were moved in February 2013.

There still remain some uncatalogued materials and ephemera, such as pamphlets that were moved but never processed. In addition, materials continue to be identified for inclusion at the ASI building, and some items have found their way back to the Ottenheimer Library that did not adequately meet the partnership’s goals. Clean-up of the bibliographic records in the library’s catalog is incomplete to date. At the same time as UALR was moving its materials to the ASI building, CALS was also preparing for the move.

Lessons Learned

It took over ten years to plan, identify, and move the materials to the ASI building. UALR and CALS also brought different cultures to a shared facility. Furthermore, decisions require staff, managers, and administrators to function within the different organizational cultures and policies of their respective institutions.

The literature states that joint-use facilities are successful if thorough discussions cover organizational culture, the design and use of physical facilities, and the collection development of information resources (Gunnels, Green, and Butler 2012). It is possible for two organizations to maintain their own personalities while contributing different strengths. Different policies and procedures needed to be brought together from both UALR and CALS. Human resources practices, blending the collections, and information technology issues were among some of the issues brought forth. For

example, there were two different policies on material reproduction and the check-out of materials to users. A new disaster plan was needed, one that spelled out each organization's responsibilities in the case of fire, flood, or other natural disaster. In addition, cross-training staff needed to take place as both the collections were merged. Constant communication between administrators and staff of both entities proved to be the key ingredient in this successful merger.

Benefits

The partnership has evolved over time and continues to change today. The parent institutions of CALS and UALR have both gained from this partnership. UALR has an enhanced visibility in the growing River Market District in downtown Little Rock. CALS has benefited from the expanded collections. The complementary collections consist of over 10,000 linear feet of manuscripts, pamphlets, architectural drawings, maps, and nearly 40,000 books. One building serves numerous communities of users. The ASI building, materials, and services get much greater use than if they were in separate locations. UALR started offering courses in historic preservation and restoration soon after the ASI building opened. Numerous lectures, events, panels, and exhibits have taken place, all of which are accessible to the public. The ASI building staff are now turning their sights on born digital materials and digital preservation relative to collections and policies. They are in a position to share this expertise and to educate libraries and museums throughout the state on best practices.

In the day-to-day activities, the challenges can seem to outweigh the advantages. However, with specific and defined needs, a partnership can come to fruition. Deborah Baldwin, dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, and the associate provost for Arkansas History and Culture, states the “partnership between UALR and CALS has provided more opportunities for students as well as providing a foot-hold in downtown Little Rock” (Baldwin 2013).

Conclusion

On March 23, 2009, the ASI building opened to the public. The impressive Arkansas archival collection of these institutes, which includes unique gubernatorial collections, as well as the collaboration between CALS and UALR, makes the ASI building a showpiece. Future historians will benefit enormously from the availability and centralized location of these resources. According to Dr. David Stricklin, CALS associate director for Special Collections and head of the Butler Center, “we think CALS/UALR partnership in the ASI building is unique. We don’t know of another major partnership of this sort between a comprehensive university and a major public library system. That partnership enables us to do many powerful things together we would have a hard time doing separately. It’s an invigorating and productive relationship” (Stricklin 2013).

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